Appendix C
Terrorist Operations and Tactics

> "Not believing in force is the same as not believing in gravity."
> - Leon Trotsky

Terrorist Operations

The discussion below presents the most common types of terrorist operations, including notes on potential tactics. By no means is this intended to be an exhaustive discussion of this topic since the combination of methods and approaches is virtually unlimited. However, one constant regarding terror operations is the use of techniques stressing surprise, secrecy, innovation, and indirect methods of attack.

For military professionals, a key principle to keep in mind is the difference in outlook between terror operations and military operations. The terrorist will utilize tactics, forces, and weapons specifically tailored to the particular mission. Terrorist operations are individualistic, in that each is planned for a specific target and effect. Additionally, terrorists will only expose as much of their resources and personnel to capture or destruction as are absolutely necessary for mission accomplishment. A military force

Figure C-1: Khobar Towers (*Source*: DOD Photo)

would approach an operation with plans to concentrate forces and keep excess combat power on hand to meet contingencies, ensure mission success, and prepare for follow-on missions. A terrorist takes a minimal force and relies upon prior planning and reconnaissance to match the force, weapons, and methods to the target. There is no concept of "follow-on missions", so there is no need for redundant capability. If changes to the target, or unexpected conditions render success unlikely, he will cancel the operation and return later with a better weapon, an updated plan, more personnel, or whatever it may require to ensure a successful operation. Mission accomplishment will in all likelihood mean the disbanding of the force, personnel returning to their cells and covers, or forming new task groups for other operations.

In addition to adaptive and flexible organizations, terrorists also employ specific equipment built or procured for a particular operation. Because of the lag time between development of a new technology and military acquisition and fielding, terrorists can sometimes procure equipment superior to standardized military models. As an example, instead of purchasing hundreds of identical radios constructed to meet all likely uses, a terrorist will only procure the quantity he needs of the newest, most capable radio appropriate for the operation. The only real limitation is funding and availability of the equipment when it is needed.

Weapons will also be tailored to the particular operation. If a directional explosive is needed, the terrorist could make use of available military models of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. Conversely, the terrorist may determine that a mine would be detected by the target's security force en route to the attack, and he therefore needs to build or obtain an alternative device. To illustrate, even counting the warheads of anti-ship cruise missiles, there was not a readily available weapon for the attack on the USS Cole. No one manufactures a half-ton C-4 platter charge configured to fit in a small boat[166], but that was exactly what the terrorist's plan required. Therefore it was exactly what the terrorist group built.

Objectives of the group(s) conducting the operation are key to predicting likely targets. Is the intent to cause loss of faith in the authorities, a provocation to inspire resistance, or to promote fear amongst the population, etc? Although several different types of operations may satisfy a particular objective, terror groups often develop expertise in one or more types of operations, and less specialization in others.

Assassination

An assassination is a deliberate action to kill specific individuals, usually VIPs (political leaders, notable citizens, collaborators, particularly effective officials, etc.), versus the killing of common people, which is considered murder. The terrorist group assassinates or murders people it cannot intimidate, people who have left the group, or people who have some symbolic significance for the enemy or world community. Terrorist groups refer to these killings as "punishment" or "justice" as a way of legitimizing them. Many targets of assassination are symbolic and are intended to have great psychological impact on the enemy. For example, assassinating an enemy government official or successful businessperson can demonstrate the enemy's inability to protect its own people. Assassinating local representatives of social or civic order, such as teachers, contributes to disorder while demoralizing other members of the local government and discouraging cooperation with them.

Assassination methods include remotely detonated bombing, the use of firearms, heavy weaponry such as anti-tank rocket launchers, and poisoning to name just a few. Extensive target surveillance and reconnaissance of engagement areas are required to select the optimum mode of attack. Although many factors play into the decision, the target's vulnerabilities ultimately determine the method of assassination. For example, a target driving to work along the same route each day may be vulnerable to an emplaced explosive device.[167] Such action requires detailed planning, similar to that for a kidnapping. The main difference is that a kidnapping seeks to keep the target alive (at least, initially), while an assassination or murder does not.

Two examples of notable assassination attempts include the Red Army Faction attempting to assassinate General Alexander Haig in 1979 when he was the SACEUR in Europe. This attempt failed. However, in 1981, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt was assassinated by fundamentalist Islamics for his support of peace in the Middle East and his relationship with the West.

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[166] John McWethy et al., no title, *ABCNews.Com,*18 October 2000; available from http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/world/ DailyNews/cole001018b.html; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003.
[167] *Encyclopedia of World Terror*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Assassination."

Hostage Taking and Barricade Situations

Hostage taking is typically an overt seizure of people to gain publicity, political concessions, or ransom. Unlike kidnapping where a prominent individual is taken, the hostages are usually not well known figures in the enemy's society. While dramatic, hostage situations are frequently risky for the terrorist group, especially when conducted in enemy territory. They expose the terrorists to hostile military or police operations, and carry significant possibility of both mission failure and capture. Therefore, terrorists will usually attempt to hold hostages in a neutral or friendly area, rather than in enemy territory. Since hostage taking is risky, the benefits must warrant conducting this type operation. For example, if the enemy captures the leader or principal members of the terrorist group, the group may take hostages to exchange for its key personnel.

An excellent example of a hostage situation was the Moscow theater siege in October 2002. Thirty-four Chechen terrorists seized a movie theater, threatening to kill all of the hostages if the Russians did not meet their demands. The rebels were demanding that Russian forces end the war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Following a long stalemate, Russian forces assaulted the theater. Sixty-seven hostages died as well as the 34 terrorists. However, 750 hostages were released.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is usually an action taken against a prominent enemy individual for a specific reason. The most common reasons for kidnapping are ransom, release of a fellow terrorist, or the desire to publicize a demand or an issue. The terrorist group conducts detailed planning, especially regarding movement of the kidnapped individual. The risk in kidnapping is relatively lower than in hostage taking primarily because the kidnapped victim is moved to a location controlled by the group. The group makes demands and is willing to hold a victim for a significant time, if necessary.

The success of kidnapping relies upon balancing the cost to the government represented by the threat of harm to the victim, with the costs of meeting the kidnappers' demands. Some kidnapping operations are actually assassinations, as the death of the victim is intended from the start. The terrorists intended objective in this case being the intermediate concessions and publicity obtained during the negotiation process that they would not receive from a simple assassination.

Kidnapping (and hostage taking) can also be used as a means of financing the organization. Ransom from seized individuals or groups are a significant slice of income for groups in several regions of the world. Latin America has long been a victim of terrorist kidnapping, especially by the FARC and ELN in Colombia. The Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines also uses this method to finance their operations.

An example of the military's vulnerability to kidnapping is the case of USMC Col. William R. (Rich) Higgins. He disappeared on Feb. 17, 1988, while serving as the Chief, Observer Group Lebanon and Senior Military Observer, United States Military Observer Group, United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. He was kidnapped and held by Iranian-backed Hizbollah terrorists and later murdered, a picture of his body hanging from a noose

released to the news media in July 1989. His remains continued to be held until they were released in December 1991.

Raid

A terrorist raid is similar in concept to a conventional operation, but is usually conducted with smaller forces against targets marked for destruction, hijacking, or hostage/barricade operations. In these cases, the raid permits control of the target for the execution of some other action. The kidnapping or assassination of a target that has a security force can often require a raid to overcome the defenses.

Extortion

Extortion is the act of obtaining money, materiel, information, or support by force or intimidation. Extortion is often used during the formative period of a group or by groups that fail to develop more sophisticated financial skills. The opportunity to engage in more lucrative money making activities, such as drug trafficking, may eventually replace the need to extort. Extortion takes the form of "war taxes" or protection money. The logistics and support cells of organizations extort money from local businesses in exchange for protection, which means not harming or bothering the business or its members. Members of the intelligence cells may also extort to collect required information.

Another form of extortion is intimidation. Intelligence cells or a specialized team intimidates people to obtain information on the group's enemy or to provide resources. Death threats against an individual or his family cause him to provide information or resources to a group with which he has no interest. A terrorist group also intimidates people not to take action. For example, enemy security personnel may not implement required security measures because of intimidation. The information cell of a terrorist group helps create and maintain the fear caused by extortion through its propaganda and deception actions.

The power of extortion and blackmail as a means of coercing individuals should not be underestimated. Several terrorist groups have successfully used these techniques to force individuals to carry out suicide bombing missions.

Ambush

An ambush is a surprise attack characterized by violence of execution and speed of action. Terrorists' use of this tactic is similar in concept to conventional military operations. The intended objective may be to cause mass casualties, assassinate an individual, or disrupt hostile security operations. Explosives, such as bombs and directional mines, are a common weapon used in terrorist ambushes. They are powerful and can be remotely detonated. Other weapons frequently used are rocket launchers, automatic weapons, and pistols.

Terrorist ambushes are frequently conducted from a variety of mobile platforms. Cars, vans and motorcycles have been used to conceal the attackers, isolate or immobilize the target, and then allow the attackers to escape. Ambushes from mobile platforms can be conducted while moving, or can be designed to bring the target to a halt in order to allow the attack team to physically close with and destroy the target.

Hijacking

Hijacking is stealing or commandeering a conveyance. There are many purposes to hijacking, such as hostage taking activities, procuring a means of escape, or as a means of destruction. While hijacking of aircraft for hostage taking has declined in frequency since the implementation of improved security measures, the use of hijacked aircraft for escape or as destructive devices continues. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 are vivid reminders of the destructive power of hijacked airliners.

The use of hijacked vehicles for destructive devices is not restricted to aircraft. Trucks carrying cargoes of explosive or flammable materials have also been seized to use as delivery devices. The possibility of such a technique being used with a ship carrying oil, refined petroleum products, or liquefied natural gas (LNG) is of great concern. The horrific results of several accidental explosions and fires from mishaps in handling such vessels in port show the catastrophic potential of this technique.[168] Ships exploding in the harbors of Texas City, Texas in 1947 and Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1917 destroyed significant portions of these towns, and had a combined death toll of over 2500.

Sabotage

Sabotage is the planned destruction of the enemy's equipment or infrastructure. The purpose of sabotage is to inflict both psychological and physical damage. Sabotage demonstrates how vulnerable the enemy is to the terrorist group's actions. Destroying or disrupting key services or facilities impresses the power of the saboteur on the public consciousness, and either increases their frustration with the ineffectiveness of the government, or inspires others to resist.

A terrorist group normally aims its sabotage actions at elements of infrastructure, in order to reinforce the perception that nothing is safe. The action can have significant economic impacts, as well as the additional effects of creating mass casualties. Water purification plants, sewage treatment facilities, air traffic control hubs, and medical treatment or research facilities are just a few examples of potential targets. Terrorist groups use many techniques, such as bombing, arson, or use of contaminates, to conduct sabotage.

Tactics and Techniques

Bombing

Bombs are the favored weapon for terrorists[169] for a variety of reasons. They are highly destructive, are flexible enough to be tailored to the mission, do not require the operator to be present, and have a significant psychological impact. They have a significant historical record, and a particular place in early anarchist and revolutionary thought, where dynamite was viewed as the equalizing force between the state and the individual.[170]

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[168] Gerald Pawle, *Secret Weapons of World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 53-54.
[169] *Encyclopedia of World Terror*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Bombing."
[170] Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 264-265.

Bombings may be used as a technique to conduct other operations, such as sabotage or assassination, or can simply be a tactic to cause terror through the destruction and casualties produced by an explosion. Bombing is clearly the favored method of terrorist attack (for example; 321 out of 457 total incidents in the U.S. 1980-1999 were bombings).[171]

Methods of delivering bombs are only limited by the imagination of the group planning the attack, and the capabilities of the individual bomb manufacturer. Directional bombs disguised as bricks in roadside walls and radio command detonated are not uncommon in the Israeli-occupied territories. The IRA has

Figure C-2 Car Bomb (*Source*: U.S. Army Photo)

developed methods of remote detonation using police laser speed detection devices that can detonate a bomb programmed to respond to a particular laser pulse within line of sight, and that is immune to the usual electronic countermeasures for radio controlled bombs.[172]

Appendix E contains descriptions of a variety of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that may be built by minimally competent terrorist groups. Appendix F discusses conventional weapons and UXOs that can be adapted to use by terrorist organizations.

Arson

Arson is a destructive technique using fire, usually in sabotage operations against property. It permits a significant destructive effect with simple equipment and little training. It is one of the most commonly used methods of terrorist attack, ranking only behind bombing and assassination in total numbers.[173] Since arson is primarily used against property, it is not normally considered as a casualty producer. Arson is most often used for symbolic attacks and economic effects. Single-issue groups, such as the Earth Liberation Front, particularly favor it for these purposes. However, it can still result in fatalities, whether intentional or not.

Hoaxes, Misdirection and Compound Attacks

At the less lethal end of the spectrum, hoaxes can simply be methods to annoy and wear down security forces, and keep the population constantly agitated. Fake bomb threats, leaving suspicious items in public places, and talcum powder "anthrax" attacks bleed time and effort from other security operations, and contribute to uncertainty and fear.

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[171] Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Counterterrorism Threat Assessment and Warning Unit, Counterterrorism Division, *Terrorism in the United States 1999,* Report 0308, (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 41.

[172] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 181.

[173] Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Counterterrorism Threat Assessment and Warning Unit, Counterterrorism Division, *Terrorism in the United States 1999,* Report 0308, (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 41.

Worse, such activities can be used to gain information about the target's response to a potential attack. Where the occupants go during the evacuation of a building, and how long it takes them to exit are useful elements of information in operational planning, and can be obtained through simply making an anonymous phone call or activating a fire alarm. Observation of regularly scheduled exercises or drills of emergency response procedures can provide similar information.

This technique can also be combined with an actual attack to circumvent fixed security measures. For example, the occupants of a bomb-resistant building with controlled access and a guard force could be forced to evacuate by a plausible, but false, threat. Many security plans would respect the potential danger such a threat represented, and evacuate the building. Unless properly secured, the evacuation has made the occupants more vulnerable to such weapons as a car bomb or other mass casualty technique placed near the exits, or at a designated assembly point.

This tactic is taken one step further in a compound attack. If the unconfirmed threat of a bomb or arson will not generate the desired evacuation, an actual attack can be substituted. Using a standoff weapon such as a rocket launcher or mortar, the attack would be of short duration and need only be effective enough to force an evacuation to the more vulnerable area. If it can be obtained, knowledge of the targets' standard response to various types of attack permits the terrorist to craft a devastating two-step assault.

Suicide Tactics

Suicide tactics are particular methods of delivering a bomb or conducting an assassination. They are defined as "An act of terror, employing an explosive or incendiary device that requires the death of the perpetrator for successful implementation."[174] Suicide attacks are different in concept and execution from "high-risk" operations. In a high-risk mission, the *likely* outcome is the death of the terrorist(s), but mission success does not *require* that the participants die. The plan will allow for possible escape or survival of the participants, no matter how slim the chances. Using suicide as a tactic *requires* the death of the participant(s) in order to succeed.

A suicide bomber constitutes a highly effective precision-guided munition in the immediate tactical sense, but has a much greater impact from psychological considerations and the seemingly unstoppable nature of the weapon/tactic. Use of suicide terrorism as a tactic is a conscious decision on the part of the leaders of terrorist organizations. It is frequently conducted as a campaign for a specific objective (e.g. withdrawal of foreign troops, interrupting peace negotiations).[175] It can often be a sign that a terror group has failed to meet it's goals through less extreme measures, and requires the tactical edge, as well as the

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[174] Martha Crenshaw, "Suicide Terrorism in Comparative Perspective," in *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (Herzilya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, The Interdisciplinary Center, 2002), 21.
[175] Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Development and Main Characteristics," in *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (Herzilya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, The Interdisciplinary Center, 2002), 85.
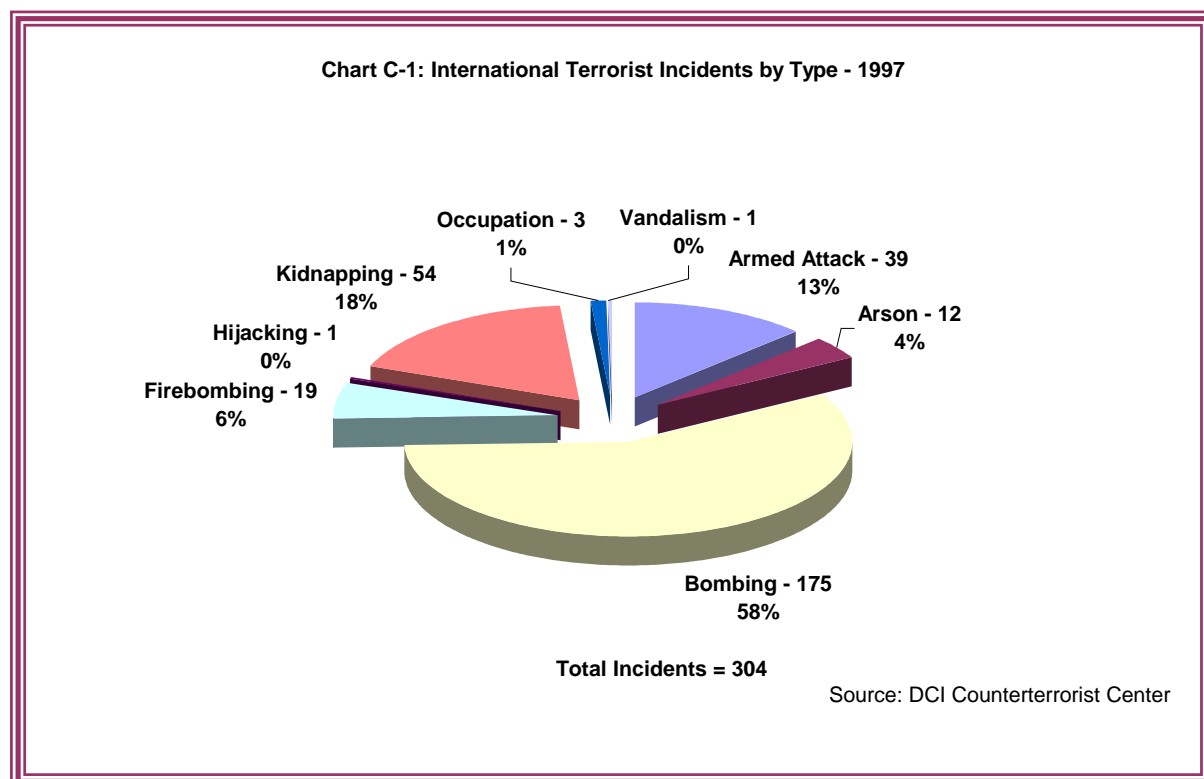
potential inspiration to it's rank and file, that suicide bombing provides.[176] It can also indicate a specific operational requirement that can be met in no other way.

Suicide attacks are not unique to religious terrorist organizations. Both religiously motivated and secular groups have employed this tactic. Individual motivations on the part of the suicide assets themselves include religious or political convictions, hatred, and being coerced by the terrorist group into the attack.

As in any other terrorist operation, extensive pre-operational surveillance and reconnaissance, exhaustive planning, and sufficient resources will be devoted to an operation employing suicide as a tactic.[177] A typical operation involving suicide can require 6-10 personnel in support, some for extensive periods of time. A specialized suicide operation, such as assassination, might require 60 or more personnel, and sophisticated agent handling techniques.

International Incidents – 1997

Chart C-1 below, based on data from the DCI Counterterrorist Center, shows the various types of international terrorist incidents recorded during 1997.[178] Although the DCI categorizes incidents somewhat different from this guide, it does provide a real world

Chart C-1: International Terrorist Incidents by Type - 1997

Occupation - 3
1%

Vandalism - 1
0%

Armed Attack - 39
13%

Kidnapping - 54
18%

Arson - 12
4%

Hijacking - 1
0%

Firebombing - 19
6%

Bombing - 175
58%

Total Incidents = 304

Source: DCI Counterterrorist Center

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[176] Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy,* no. 120 (September/October 2000): 66-73.

[177] Rohan Gunaratna, "Suicide Terrorism: a Global Threat," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (20 October 2000): 1-7; available from http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/usscole/jir001020_1_n.shtml; Internet; accessed 7 September 2002.

[178] Director of Central Intelligence, DCI Counterterrorist Center*, International Terrorism in 1997: A Statistical View* (Washington, D.C., 1998), 1; available from http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/terror97cia/event.jpg; Internet; accessed 3 February 2003.

representation of the various operations and tactics conducted by terrorists. As stated above, bombs are the favorite weapon of terrorists, which is supported by the fact that 58% of the incidents in 1997 were bombings.